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Davis, Andrew McFarland

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Cambridge [Mass.]

1910

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TWO FORGOTTEN PAMPHLETEERS

IN THE

MASSACHUSETTS CURRENCY CONTROVERSY

1720-1740

BY

ANDREW McFARLAND DAVIS

TWO
FORGOTTEN PAMPHLETEERS

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1720–1740

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ANDREW McFARLAND DAVIS

CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN WILSON AND SON.
University Press.
1910.

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From the
Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society
for March, 1910.

TWO FORGOTTEN PAMPHLETEERS

In August, 1730, Jonathan Belcher assumed charge of the government of the province of Massachusetts Bay. About that time the privy council and the board of trade had become alarmed at the freedom with which the province had been emitting bills of public credit by way of loans to counties or towns as well as for the purpose of meeting the current expenses of the government. Very shortly after taking charge of affairs of state Belcher called the attention of the assembly to the sixteenth and eighteenth of the royal instructions given him when he assumed office. These were in effect that he should not give assent to any act whereby bills of public credit were to be issued unless such act contained a clause requiring the approval of the board of trade before it could become operative. Annual issues to the extent of £30,000 were, however, permitted without approval being first obtained, provided they were made for the current expenses of the government. Not more than £30,000 of such bills were thereafter to be current at one time, and all outstanding bills were to be called in at the times specified in the acts of emission. In the year 1730 £13,000 were emitted, the fund for the redemption of which was the most remote of all the then existing funds. The bills emitted at that time were not to be called in until 1741. The effect, therefore, of these royal instructions was that during the next ensuing eleven years all the outstanding currency, in amount probably something like £300,000, was to be called in, and that thereafter the province was to get along with £30,000 of bills of public credit as a medium of trade unless more were specifically authorized by the board of trade. It was supposed by observers of the period that the total amount of silver in use in the four New England colonies at the time when the paper money was first

put in circulation was about £200,000, and the impending conditions which would result from the enforcement of the royal instructions, unless there should be some organized effort to supply coin to fill the vacancy which would thus be created in the circulating medium, were little short of calamitous. Men of speculative temperaments began to suggest remedial plans, and beginning with the year 1738 the pamphleteers took a lively hand in the debate. One result of the discussion was the emission of bills of public credit couched in a different form of phraseology from those that were already in circulation. These latter, which from that date onward were known as "old tenor," were declared on their face to be "in value equal to money." The new bills, known thereafter as "new tenor," had a specific value stated in troy weight in silver or gold, and were made receivable for taxes, public dues and in payments generally on the basis of one of the new tenor for three of the old tenor. The efficacy of the new tenor bills was thereby greatly magnified, and as this ratio could be approximately maintained through the different rates at which they were received for taxes, they greatly aided the government in coping with the situation for a few years.

In 1738 and again in 1739 two abortive attempts were made to return to specie payments, through schemes to secure from the province five and ten year loans to merchants who would agree to pay back the sums borrowed in silver or gold, on the terms proposed. The schemes fell through in consequence of the failure to procure the requisite subscriptions to the loans, but the proposed borrowing in 1738 brought forth a publication from the pen of one of the pamphleteers with whom we are concerned which precipitated a discussion between him and Dr. Douglass, a man whose reputation is well known, not only to the medical profession of our day, but also to our economists.

The pamphlet in question was anonymously published in Boston in 1738 and was entitled,

Some observations on the scheme projected for emitting 60,000 l. in bills of a new tenour, to be redeemed with silver and gold. Shewing the various operations of these bills, and their tendency to hurt the publick interest. In a letter from a merchant in Boston, to his friend in the country. Boston: Printed and sold by S. Kneeland and T. Green in Queen Street, MDCCXXXVIII.

It was a small octavo, twenty-five pages in length, and was, as its title indicates, written for the purpose of opposing the scheme of the Boston merchants which had been inaugurated in the hope that through and by means of it the province might be brought to a specie basis.

"Some observations" was in the form of a letter, and this letter was dated "Boston, Feb. 1. 1737, 8." Its publication was followed by the appearance of an anonymous pamphlet without date, issued by the same publishers and bearing the following title:

An Essay concerning silver and paper currencies, more especially with regard to the British Colonies in New-England.

This was from the pen of Dr. Douglass and was evidently inspired by the appearance of the former pamphlet. The doctor, although he did not approve of the scheme of the Boston merchants, nevertheless felt called upon to expose and refute some of the heresies contained in "Some observations." The Essay is twenty-three pages in length, and the first fourteen pages of it are devoted to the discussion of silver currencies. Then paper currencies are taken up, and finally the last nine pages contain criticisms of separate paragraphs extracted from "Some observations." The Essay was obviously written in 1738, immediately after the appearance of the pamphlet which brought it forth, and was unquestionably published at once, the probability being that this took place in the fall of that year.

Dr. Douglass, through his work on the Essay, evidently became much interested in the subject of the currency, and in 1740 when the Land Bank and the Silver Bank engaged in their struggle to secure, each for itself, a charter from the province under which they might respectively emit bills of credit, he again entered the field as the defender of hard money and in addition thereto as the denouncer of the Land Bank and the exposer of its iniquities. His contribution this time, through the same publishers, was

A Discourse concerning the currencies of the British plantations in America. Especially with regard to their paper money; more particularly, in relation to the province of the Massachusetts-Bay, in New England.

The pamphlet was forty-seven pages in length, was anonymous, and the place and date of its publication were given as Boston, 1740.

The author of "Some observations" was prompted by the cavalier way in which his pamphlet was torn to pieces by Dr. Douglass in his "Essay concerning silver and paper currencies" to return to the field of battle and defend himself as best he could. He was deliberate in his motions and published in 1740, through S. Kneeland and T. Green, a pamphlet entitled,

An Inquiry into the nature and uses of money; more especially of the bills of publick credit, old tenor. Together with a proposal of some proper relief in the present exigence. To which is added, a reply to the Essay on silver and paper currencies.

Following the plan of Douglass, he devoted the first part of his pamphlet to his general topic, and on the forty-fifth page took up the specific subject of the teachings of the "Essay" which he proceeded to riddle for eighteen pages more. While he was running the pamphlet through the press, Douglass's Discourse came out, and to this he felt called upon to reply. He therefore added a hasty postscript of fifteen pages, and in this form, with the postscript appended, the "Inquiry" was anonymously issued, making a volume of seventy-eight pages.

To the "Inquiry" Douglass proceeded to make answer at once, and notwithstanding the fact that the Discourse had been in the hands of the booksellers for some time, and that the Inquiry actually contained a reply to the Discourse, he published his refutal of the doctrine of the "Inquiry," in the form of a postscript to the Discourse, beginning with page forty-nine and ending with page sixty-two. Naturally we find today on the shelves of our libraries the Discourse without the Postscript, the Postscript without the Discourse, and the Discourse and the Postscript together.

The five pamphlets which have been heretofore described were put upon the market separately and were also collated, stitched together, bound with a paper cover and sold as a whole, the order of their arrangement in this book being "Some observations," "An Essay concerning silver and paper currencies," "A Discourse concerning the currencies," "An Inquiry into the nature and uses of money," and the "Postscript to the Discourse," or the "Postcript to the Discourse" as the title was actually given.

These details concerning the publication and chronological arrangement of this series of pamphlets may seem to be of little consequence, but their comprehension is essential because we have in "Some Observations," and in "An Inquiry," two pamphlets from the pen of Hugh Vans, one of the pamphleteers with whom we deal today, while on the other hand it was through the detachment of the postscript to Douglass's "Discourse," from the body of that pamphlet and its separate publication, that the fact became known to me that in 1720 John Valentine, then attorney general of the province, published a small three-page brochure under designation of "The Postscript."[1] It is true that this Postscript is referred to in 1720 by title by one or two of the participants in this polemical discussion, but the references were so contemptuous and brief that it did not convey to me a clear idea that a separate pamphlet had been actually published under that name. The narrative of the circumstances under which I became aware of this fact will reveal the curious manner in which Douglass's Postscript aided in the contribution of a new number to the list prepared by me of currency tracts of the eighteenth century.

In the course of my work as editor of a set of reprints of the currency tracts of the eighteenth century which are about to be published by the Prince Society, I made out a list of those which were known to me, and forwarded the same in a circular letter to several of our most prominent libraries, asking each library to designate which of the publications named were to be found on its shelves. In the preparation of this list, the question arose, Was the Postscript to Douglass's Discourse a separate publication? After some reflection, I determined, notwithstanding the fact that it began with page forty-nine, that it was separately issued and was entitled to reproduction in my series, in chronological order after the "Inquiry into the nature and uses of money." The response to my circular letter from the Library of Congress stated that their copy of the Postscript was published in 1720, not 1740. This led of course to further investigation, and to the disclosure that in this little three-page brochure having

[1] Reprinted in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., I. 444-448.

for its sole title the words "The Postscript" we had a tract connected with the currency controversy entirely new to me. It was possible that it might be found in other libraries. My inquiry had been as to the presence of the Postscript to the Discourse published in 1740, and in answering the question, there was no special reason why any librarian should have gone outside the direct answer to the specific question. Special inquiry revealed the fact that the American Antiquarian Society has a mutilated copy of the Postscript. This copy was originally folded so that it might be filed away in a letter file, and in the course of time the paper became weak at the folds, and the strips at the edges dropped off and were lost. Whoever filed it away wrote upon the upper right-hand corner of the first page the words, "By Mr. Valentine ye [ ]." It was a fair presumption that the missing words required to fill the blank were in substance some term descriptive of Valentine's position which originally was written upon the strip of paper that had become detached and was lost.

If in our examination of the careers of these two pamphleteers, Vans and Valentine, we take up that of the author of "The Postscript" first and seek to ascertain who "Mr. Valentine" was, we find that his mark upon the controversial literature of the period was confined, so far as we can learn, to this three-page production. The pamphlet was published in 1720, at a time when the currency controversy was particularly active. The tentative list prepared by myself of pamphlets connected with this subject which were published from 1714 to 1751 inclusive, comprehended, exclusive of newspaper communications many of which were long enough to have made good-sized pamphlets, fifty-two titles, and of these nineteen were issued in the years 1719, 1720, and 1721. Four of them preceded the Postscript, and of these four "The Distressed state of the town of Boston considered" was one. This latter pamphlet, although published anonymously, was generally recognized as from the hand of John Colman, a Boston merchant of considerable notoriety and an advocate in a general way of paper money, but especially of paper money to be furnished by a private bank of emission. He was one of the signers of the "Vindication of the bank of credit" in 1714.

The Postscript contains nothing which should especially have excited any individuals other than the author of the "Distressed state" and his personal friends, but its appearance evidently caused some commotion, and the cudgels were immediately taken up in Colman's behalf by the author of

A Letter from a Gentleman, containing some Remarks upon the Several Answers, given unto Mr. Colman's, Entituled, The Distressed State of the Town of Boston.[1]

This letter has been identified as from the pen of Dr. Oliver Noyes, a well-known Boston man of the day, and in it (p. 3) Noyes says:

I have also seen a piece of sulled paper Intituled, *The Postscript*, which I hastily ran over, but thought it not worth while to give it a second reading, being sensible that none but some very mean wretch could be so simple to think the Cause (of which he would be thought a Patron) could receive any benefit by the railing of such a *Rabshica*.[2] However, I put it in my Pocket, thinking it might serve (as dirty as it was,) for a necessary occasion; but Sir, I can assure you, you 'l suffer nothing by such Scurrility.

One other person had participated in the discussion which had taken place in 1720 up to this time, and that was Reverend Edward Wigglesworth. He had anonymously communicated to the Boston News-Letter, April 18, 1720,

The country-mans answer, to a letter intituled, The Distressed state of the town of Boston considered,[3]

and under date of April 23, 1720, had published a pamphlet entitled,

A Letter from One in the country to his friend in Boston, containing some remarks upon a late Pamphlet, entituled The Distressed state of the town of Boston, &c.[4]

Neither of these letters was signed, but it is evident that when the author of the Postscript refers to previous publications in the controversy, by Rusticus and Agricola, it was to the News-Letter contribution and the pamphlet of Wiggles-

[1] Reprinted in "Tracts relating to the Currency," 279 *et seq.*; also in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., II. 3 *et seq.*

[2] 2 Kings, 18. 27.

[3] Reprinted in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., I. 409 *et seq.*

[4] Reprinted in "Tracts relating to the Currency," 247 *et seq.*; also in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., I. 415 *et seq.*

worth, both of which purported to come from the country, that he meant to allude. With this knowledge of the place occupied by the Postscript in the currency discussion of the period we may turn to a consideration of the traces left behind him by its author and of his probable relations to his fellow citizens.

In these days men who aspire to the elective offices in our municipalities oftentimes pay large sums of money for the mere chance of being elected, but in the middle of the eighteenth century Boston expected and even demanded public service from all of her prominent citizens. The town records and the records of the selectmen are filled with lists of the names of persons elected as representatives, selectmen, constables, viewers of fences, viewers of shingles and measurers of boards, timber, etc., clerks of the market, hog-reeves, overseers of the poor, sealers of leather, surveyors of highways, tithing-men, scavengers, school committeemen, and fire wardens. If the name of a male resident of good standing in Boston at this period does not appear in the records of the town and of the selectmen, and that, too, many times, it is a violation of the rule and raises at once a doubt as to the authenticity of the claim that the person named was in fact a resident at that time of Boston.

To these records we naturally turn, therefore, in expectation of finding some recognition of "Mr. Valentine" the author, provided he were a Boston man. The answer of these volumes to our question is that the family name of Valentine is not to be found in the indexes of the records contemporary with these events. Nevertheless it is extremely probable that John Valentine of Boston, for many years a notary public and a justice of the peace, and later the attorney general[1] of the province, was the author of the Postscript, and this too in spite of the further facts that his name is not to be found among the attorney generals given in Whitmore's list of civil officers in the province, and that it is missing in that reservoir of information concerning prominent residents in Boston in early days, the "History of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company." How the name of a man filling so distinguished a position as that of attorney general escaped Whitmore is not easy to say, although it must be

[1] 2 Proc., x. 289.

remembered that the subsequent publication of Sewall's Diary, where Valentine is spoken of in his official character, and the greater facilities recently placed at the disposal of the searcher of our court records would render such an oversight far more culpable today than it was when Whitmore published his list. It is quite likely that Valentine's appointment as notary public,[1] June 3, 1698 and again October 24, 1712, and December 10, 1715, and his elevation to the position of justice of the peace[2] April 16, 1718, all of which appointments are mentioned by Whitmore, may explain the absence of his name from the Boston records. The simple fact that the appointments were made is equivalent to pages of biography of the man. They stamp him even before he was elevated to the conspicuous position of attorney general, as one of the hated class of office-holders through governmental appointment, with whom in the days of political excitement in the province the townspeople of Boston had little to do and for whom in the management of their daily affairs they had no use whatever. It is not unlikely that the holder of a commission of notary public was the object of more than ordinary suspicion. Mr. Goodell points out in a note in the first volume of the Province Laws,[3] that in 1720 the assembly as a whole asserted its rights under the charter to elect these officers, a function which up to that time had been exercised by the governor and council. He also quotes a resolution of the assembly in December, 1720, forbidding one Joseph Marion from performing the duties of a notary, the right to do which was claimed by him under a commission issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury.[4] It will be seen that through this quarrel over the right of appointment, the office had become a political sport and holders of a gubernatorial commission were probably especially unpopular.

Valentine's services as notary have left traces of his career on our records.[5] The most prominent of these was his *ex-officio* service as register of the court in the trial of Captain Quelch and his company for piracy in 1704.[6] So also the principal events of his domestic career, his marriage with Mary

[1] Whitmore's Mass. Civil List, 162; [2] 126.
[3] Mass. Prov. Laws, I. 731; [4] I. 732; x. 64.
[5] New Eng. Hist. and Gen. Reg., XIX. 142.
[6] Mass. Prov. Laws, VIII. 391.

Lynde, the daughter of Samuel Lynde, by the Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth, April 16, 1702,[1] and the births of his five children[2] are recorded and will be found in the book of marriages and the book of births.

Judge Washburn found traces of his work as an attorney in the records of our courts, and left upon the pages of his Judicial History of Massachusetts the following appreciation of his legal capacity: "he manifested great familiarity with legal principles as well as ability as an advocate. He is said also to have been 'an agreeable and expressive speaker.'"[3] Mr. Goodell has collated a number of Valentine's pleas and briefs, doubtless the same as those which gave rise to Judge Washburn's favorable opinion, and they are to be found in the eighth volume of the Province Laws. His name occurs also in the House Journal, and is to be found in the volumes in the Province Laws devoted to resolves. He was a petitioner to the General Court, December 1, 1719,[4] for an allowance for travelling expenses and to the representatives November 11, 1720,[5] for an allowance for his official services as attorney general for the last two years.[6] He is described in this last petition as "late Attorney General." He was one of the Boston citizens who received a vote of thanks from the General Court for their patriotism in taking the loan of £40,000 in aid of the Hill and Walker Expedition in 1711.[7]

He showed good judgment in the selection of real estate investments, for his name is associated with property on what was then known as Marlborough, but which we now call Washington Street.[8] His will was probated in 1724 and is to be found under number 4850 Suffolk files.

A sketch of his life is to be found in "The Valentines in America,"[9] in which it is stated that the family came from Lancashire, England. This fact enables us to identify him, at least conjecturally, with the person who is represented in a contemporary pamphlet entitled "Reflections upon reflec-

[1] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 28. 6; [2] 24. 17, 24, 88, 110, 125, the births of Samuel, Elizabeth, Thomas, Mary and Edmund.
[3] Sketches, 186.
[4] Mass. House Jour., 56; [5] 18.
[6] Mass. Prov. Laws, IX. 694; [7] 191.
[8] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 29. 198.
[9] p. 110; New Eng. Hist. and Gen. Reg., XX. 221.

tions,"[1] as having interfered with the proceedings of a Boston town meeting held June 10, 1720, for the election of representatives. This being the Pretender's birthday, the intruder proposed that the oaths of allegiance and abjuration should be administered to all the inhabitants of the town. The writer says, "This extremely exasperated the Town, to be challenged by such a d—— D——, when perhaps there are not *400* more *true* and *loyal* subjects (with humble submission to Lancashire Jack) in the King's dominions." In an advertisement appended to "A letter to an eminent clergy-man,"[2] the Postscript is alluded to as the "Lancashire Postscript." These facts, that is to say, his family coming from Lancashire and his Postscript being called the Lancashire Postscript, taken in connection with the additional fact that his name was John, seem to furnish sufficient warrant for connecting him with "Lancashire Jack" and with the intrusion at the town meeting. The published record of the meeting contains no reference to the disturbance.

Sewall in his Diary[3] furnishes us with a few interesting notes. November 27, 1718, the judge speaks of him as our "new Attorney General," and records the fact that Valentine entertained the governor, the lieutenant governor and the judges at supper. If Valentine was a new attorney general in November, 1718, and if in November, 1720, as "late attorney general" he petitioned for "an allowance for services during the last two years," we have a close approximation to his term of service in that office.

Judge Sewall[4] gives us a hint as to his convivial habits in noting his presence, January 29, 1719, at Captain Douse's, where the party drank several bowls of punch. The author of "Reflections upon reflections,"[5] the tract from which we have already quoted, speaks of him as sitting down "to blot with his detestable Scurrility, a Paper call'd the *Deadham Postscript;* in which posture were it not just to paint him (something as I've seen King *J*——) with the Father of Lyes at his right hand to *instigate* and *dictate*, and an huge Bowl of exhillerating PUNCH at his left to *intoxicate*." Even this bitter attack is not enough for the writer. Continuing his

[1] p. 10; Reprinted in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., II. 110 *et seq.*
[2] p. 241 of Reprint in Colonial Currency Reprints, Prince Soc., II. 227 *et seq.*
[3] 5 Coll. VII. 204; [4] 211. [5] p. 8, Colonial Currency Reprints, II. 114.

abuse for about a page of the pamphlet, he makes in the course of it one more hint as to Valentine's habits which if it may not necessarily be accepted as true is nevertheless an infallible sign of the extent to which the man was hated. "But," says the writer after a reference to a verse in the New Testament, "what has this man to do with the Gospel? Has he ever read Psal. 50. 16, and onward? Or doth Paul give a toleration for men to *be drunk*, and in their Merry Cups to *thresh their wives* contrary to Light and Law of Nature as well as the Gospel?" If we turn to the fiftieth Psalm, the nineteenth verse being fairly representative of the sixteenth and onward will sufficiently indicate why one writing in the mood of this author should have referred Valentine to it. "Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit."

It would be a relief in recording the death of Valentine, February 1, 1723–24, if we could close this melancholy story of rancor, hatred, and abuse with some signs of relenting on the part of his enemies, but with characteristic complacence Sewall winds up his reference to the whole matter with a contemptible and malicious thrust at the widow which was almost inhuman in its malevolence. It appears that Valentine, February 1, 1723–24, committed suicide by hanging himself in the attic of his own house. A coroner's jury returned a verdict of *Non Compos*. Arrangements were made for holding the funeral on Tuesday, February 4, and Sewall narrates what then took place as follows:

Persons and Bearers were invited, and the Bells Tôld as customarily at Funerals. Judge Davenport, and Col. Fitch were invited to be Bearers, and came. But when they saw Mr. Myles refused to read the Office of Burial, they ask'd excuse, and went away. Bearers were, Mr. Secretary Willard, (a titular brother) Mr. Jno. Nelson; Mr. Attorney Genl Read, Mr. Robt Auchmuty; Mr. Overing and Mr. Robinson. Four Justices were there; Mr. Secr. Willard, Mr. Daniel Oliver (a Relation of the Widow) Capt. Timo Clark, and Mr. John Ruck. Five Ministers; Mr. Benjamin Wadsworth, Mr. Thomas Foxcroft, Mr. Samuel Myles, Mr. Henry Harris, and Mr. Mosman of Marblehead, and much people. This Funeral seem'd to me as if the Widow would brave it out against the Terrible Providence of God: which caused me to insert in the News-Letter of Feb. 6.

Boston, Feb. 1, 172$\frac{3}{4}$.

Quid valet innumeras scire, atque evolvere causas?
Si facienda fugis, si fugienda facis.[1]

[1] 5 Coll. VII. 330.

On the tenth of February Sewall[1] records that against the advice of Mr. Auchmuty "a fair character" of Valentine had been inserted by the widow in the "Boston Gazette," and in the "New-England Courant," and that the "Boston News-Letter" had been paid to publish it in the number of that paper forthcoming on the thirteenth.

This made me publish Dr. Increase Mather's Sermon, which was preach'd about ten days after Merchant [William] Taylor[2] hang'd himself with a new Snaffle Bridle. Advertisement of the sermon printed is inserted in the News-Letter March 19.

Sure enough in the News-Letter of that date we find advertised as for sale,

A Call to the Tempted. A Sermon on the horrid Crime of Self Murder, Preached on a Remarkable Occasion, by the Memorable Dr. Increase Mather. And now Published from his Notes, for a Charitable Stop to suicides. Sold by Samuel Gerrish, at his Shop near the Brick Meeting-House in Corn-hill, Boston.[3]

Not content with seeking to deprive the poor widow of what comfort she could get from the fact that many friends stood by her in spite of the calumnious attacks in "Reflections upon reflections," and in disregard of the refusal of the Reverend Mr. Myles to read the office of burial and of the declination of the two bearers to serve at the funeral, he had inserted the ill-tempered lines in the News-Letter of the sixth, and now to offset what satisfaction she could get from the publication of the eulogistic notice in the newspapers, he had caused the Mather sermon to be published. Did he send the widow a copy? Doubtless he did.

It is but fair to the memory of Valentine that his friends should have the last inning. The notice published in the News-Letter, February 13th, 1724, read as follows:

On Tuesday the 4th instant, The Corps of *John Vallentine* Esq; His Majesty's Advocate General for the Provinces of the *Massachusetts-Bay, New-Hampshire* and Colony of *Rhode Island*, was here decently Interred: He was a Gentleman for his Knowledge & Integrity most Eminent in his Profession, Clear in his Conceptions, and Distinguishable happy in his Expressions. It pleased GOD, some short time

[1] 5 Coll. VII. 331. [2] July 12, 1682, — 5 Coll. V. 49.
[3] Sibley's Harvard Graduates, I. 469.

before his Death to deprive him of these Excellent Endowments by afflicting him with a deep Melancholly which brought on the Loss of his Reason, and was the Cause of his much Lamented Death.

Hugh Vans, the author of "Some observations on the scheme projected for emitting 60,000 l." and of "An Inquiry into the nature and uses of money," was a Boston merchant of good standing, who was obviously quite facile with his pen, but who did not, like Dr. Douglass, his adversary in this controversy, gain renown from his contributions thereto. The side that he took would today prejudice the public against him and would militate against the reception by his writings of the praise to which they are entitled, for he placed himself on the side of the paper-money men. It must be said in fairness to him that the quality of his work as a controversialist was superior to that of most of the advocates of paper money. In his first pamphlet he entered into calculations to show how the scheme which he had under discussion might in its operations affect borrowers or lenders, quoted from the province laws and from writers on finance, and even though he promulgated doctrines which are not acceptable today, his treatment of the subject in this as well as in the second of his pamphlets was on a much higher plane and betrayed far more studied preparation than that which characterizes most of the publications of the day.

Attention was first called to the fact that Vans was the author of the "Inquiry," in the sixth number of the twelfth volume of the Bulletin of the New York Public Library, page 394, where the following entry is made. "'By Mr. Hugh Vance, Mercht.' is written on the titlepage in an eighteenth-century hand." This carries with it the authorship of "Some observations," which, notwithstanding the views on finance to be found therein, has been erroneously attributed to Dr. Douglass. It ought never to have been assigned to Douglass, for, as we have already seen, the last part of Douglass's Essay was devoted to an answer to "Some observations," but, however that may be, Vans himself settled the question of authorship on page 45 of the "Inquiry," where he acknowledged that "Some observations" was the product of his pen. The identification of the author of these pamphlets, through the endorsement on the titlepage of the copy of the "Inquiry," in the New York Public Library, is corroborated by a

somewhat similar endorsement on the titlepage of the copy in the "Boston Athenæum," the legend on which reads, "The Gift of the Author Mr Hugh Vans Me[ ] in Boston, to — J. Lowell." There may be some doubt as to the termination of the name of the author in this inscription, for some indiscreet person has made an entry in ink, resembling a shelf-mark, directly over the name. With the knowledge to aid us that the New York copy was attributed to "Hugh Vance," one can see that the final letters of the name which are obscured by the numbering placed over them were probably "ns" and not "nce." A merciless binder has by indiscreet trimming eliminated what followed the "Me," but we could readily supply the remainder of the word "merchant" without the aid of the writing on the New York copy of the "Inquiry."

The name of the family is supposed to have been at one time De Vans, then to have become Vans, and finally the spelling has been altered in many instances to Vance.[1] The suggestion of French origin for the family carries with it the idea that they were Huguenots. A hundred years later a grandson of Hugh, who had inherited the pamphleteering instincts of his ancestor, gave vent to his feelings as a disappointed litigant by publishing the story of his grievances. He referred to his grandfather Hugh Vans as a respectable merchant in the city of Boston.[2] An allusion to the fact that his ancestry were French Huguenots is couched in language too fantastic for reproduction as historic evidence, but the fact that he did so may be cited as a tradition as to the origin of the family.

Our first trace of the career of "Hugh Vans, Merchant,' is furnished by himself in "An Inquiry," page 54, where, speaking of Douglass's statement that about twenty years ago, that is, in 1718, Sweden had imposed upon the people government notes instead of specie, Vans says,

> I was in Stockholm, the capital, in the year 1718, being the last of Charles XII and never then or since heard of any State-Bills passing about that time, . . .

In 1725 he was elected constable, but was excused from service.[3] He joined that year in an agreement made by the

[1] Hayden's Virginia Genealogies, 457.

[2] "A New Edition of the demand of William Vans, on Stephen Codman," Boston, 1824, 11.

[3] Boston Rec.Com. Rep., 8. 194.

greater part of the Boston merchants not to purchase from Marblehead fishermen dried codfish at above a certain stipulated price.[1] In 1726 he was elected constable and was again excused.[2] August 17, 1726, he was married by the Reverend Joseph Sewall to Mary Pemberton, a daughter of Reverend Ebenezer Pemberton of the Old South Church,[3] and between that time and the year 1733 inclusive there were registered, as offspring of this marriage, four children, three sons and a daughter.[4]

March 10, 1735–36, Vans was put on a committee to audit the Boston treasurer's accounts,[5] and on the 28th of April, 1736, was one of the committee regularly appointed from year to year to prepare instructions for the representatives from Boston to the General Court. The proposed instructions were submitted on the 21st of May, but the report was not considered until May 24. The committee asserted that our laws, liberties and properties were in danger. They therefore requested the representatives "to guard against, and defend us from, all encroachments that may be attempted against our natural rights or charter privileges." They called attention to the royal instructions relative to calling in bills of public credit and said that the distressing condition of the province rendered compliance with these orders impracticable if not impossible.[6]

July 23, 1736, Vans was chosen assessor, but exercising the same facility for evading a duty that he did not care to perform as had secured him relief from service as constable and as overseer of the poor, he was again excused.[7] September 21, 1737,[8] he was put on a committee to address the General Court in behalf of the town of Boston in regard to the disproportionate charge for the expenses of the representatives, under which it was believed that the town was suffering. This committee reported on the 23d.[9]

May 10, 1738, Vans was again put on the committee to draw up instructions for the Boston representatives in the General Court.[10] They were to deal with the trade of the province;

[1] Winthrop papers, Mass. Hist. Soc., 21. fol. 2, MS.
[2] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 8. 201.
[3] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 28. 135; also "An Appeal to the Public by William Vans," Salem 1827, 99.
[4] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 24. 184, 195, 200, 210.
[5] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 12. 135, 138, 143; [6] 145–147; [7] 151; [8] 175.
[9] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 12. 177, 178; [10] 195.

the paper currency; the extraordinary proportion of the public taxes, which it was apprehended that the town was paying; and also they were to discuss the proposed division of the county of Suffolk. The report of this committee, submitted May 17, fills nearly four pages in the published reports of the commissioners of records.[1] It deals with the Rhode Island bills of public credit, which the committee say "our necessities compel us to use." It discusses the proportion of taxation borne by Boston, and it enjoins the representatives

not to consent to any further Supply of the Treasury for any growing Charge of the Province Unless the Funds for discharging the same be put on sutable Years after Seventeen Hundred and Forty One.

The representatives are also enjoined

to Oppose the foreclosing the Deliberations of future Assemblies between this, and Seventeen Hundred and Forty One, relating to the Bills of Public Credit of the Old Tenor; but that they may be left free to Act when the Years shall come, According as they shall judge most Advisable for the safety of the Province.

The representatives were practically urged to get rid of the new tenor bills and to re-instate the old tenor. The general purport of the instructions was, — Do what you can to impede the enforcement of the royal instructions in the currency matter.

November 21, 1738, Vans was on another committee whose function was to prepare a report, this time being appointed chairman.[2] May 2, 1739,[3] he was again on the committee to prepare instructions to the representatives. A lengthy report of the same general style and character as the one before referred to, was submitted by this committee May 18.[4] March 9, 1740, he was chairman of a committee to inquire into encroachments upon the town's rights on Fort Hill.[5] He was put to further service in this matter by being put on a committee to wait upon the captain general.[6]

In 1746 he was apparently a selectman, and as such was made ex-officio a member of a committee on the 22d of September,

to wait upon his Excellency the Governour, and the Honorable the Council to Inform them that the Town apprehending great Danger

[1] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 12. 197–201; [2] 203; [3] 222; [4] 224–229; [5] 261;
[6] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 12. 287.

arising to em by such a number of persons Subjects to the French King, being allowed to pass and Repass the Streets as they now do, desired the Selectmen to Apply to two of His Majestys Justices of the peace (Quorum Unus) to Grant a Warrant to Apprehend and Secure 'em in prison pursuant to a law of this province, which the Selectmen accordingly did, and the Constables of the Town by Virtue thereof apprehended about one hundred French Persons and Carried 'em to his Majestys Goal in Boston, but the High Sheriff of this County treated the said Warrant in a very Contemptious manner and Would not receive the said persons therein mentioned, nor suffer 'em to Remain there and so they again go at large,[1] . . .

This committee reported, September 25, that Governor Shirley demanded that the charges against the sheriff be put in writing. Such charges were prepared and were submitted September 27th, and again Vans as selectman was ex-officio a member of the committee to wait upon the governor and council, and present the charges.[2]

April 11, 1748, the wardens of King's Chapel petitioned for a grant of land for the enlargement of the chapel. Vans was put on the committee to consider the property of grant.[3] The last mention of his name that we find in the records, if not so pathetic as that with which the notice of Valentine was closed, is nevertheless of a sort to excite our sympathy. February 6, 1758, in his old age, after a career of activity in his own and in town affairs, he was adjudged a bankrupt.[4]

Our review of the traces left behind them of these two forgotten pamphleteers has revealed to us, on the one hand, the career of an office-holder, obviously haughty in manner, and aristocratic in his way of life, a follower of the little provincial court set up by the governor, a cultivated lawyer, an adroit special pleader, and a looker down upon the crude attempts of his fellow citizens to wrest from the governor and council some of the powers of government which had been taken from them through the annulment of the colonial charter and the substitution therefor of a provincial government. Fiercely hated, he was atrociously maligned. Let us hope that there was no foundation for these assaults.

On the other hand, as we follow the career of Vans, we have glimpses of a man who has been something of a traveller

[1] Boston Rec. Com. Rep., 14. 104, 105; [2] 14. 106; [3] 145.
[4] Mass. Prov. Laws, iv. 108.

and who evidently was a free and easy writer. The presence of his name year after year upon town committees the main functions of which were to prepare reports indicates that his fellow citizens appreciated his capacity as an author. It is plain that he was radically opposed to Valentine upon every political point.

As a currency writer he was on the paper-money side, and it has already been said that his methods betrayed some study of the subjects upon which he wrote and placed him as a writer upon a higher plane than most of his compatriots on that side of the question. We have already had occasion to call attention to his reply to Douglass's statement as to the government notes of Sweden in 1718. To what has been already quoted Vans added that what Gortz did was to emit copper coins with nominal ratings of value, such that they were mere tokens, and that the trouble was caused by the fact that to these there was attached a legal tender function. In speaking of the Bank of Venice, Vans makes no mention of notes emitted by the bank, but discusses fully the function of the bank credit which was made use of in place of notes. Douglass had spoken of the bills of the Bank of Venice, a statement for which he could have found justification through the use of the same words by many other writers, but when the doctor in his criticisms in the opening portions of the Postscript to the Discourse came to what Vans had said of the Bank of Venice, he did not undertake to refute him, but turned the subject off with a mere assertion that Vans had given "an imperfect account of the Bank of Venice and Amsterdam, of Baron Gorts Mint tokyns in Sweeden," etc. In other words, he was not quite prepared to discuss this question in detail.

On the whole, it may be said, then, that our pamphleteer on the patriotic side makes a fairly good record for himself. He appears before us as an honored citizen of Boston, whom his fellow citizens made use of from year to year upon important committees. He published pamphlets which contain within their pages marks of study and of intellectual capacity for independent analysis. His whimsical theories must not be judged by the standards of today. The paper-money men of that time were the pioneers in the promulgation of the doctrines of credit, which have resulted in the wonderful development of the use of money in our day, through bank-bills,

checks and drafts. The doctrines of the hard-money men applied to their full extent would have held the world back in its progress. Neither side in the discussion appreciated fully what they were talking about. It is for us today to recognize merit where we can see it, whether on the one side or the other.

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TITLE